



Understanding Our Struggling Readers Standard

The program prepares elementary teacher candidates to teach reading skills to students at risk of reading failure.

WHY THIS STANDARD?

In most cases, the root cause of a diagnosis of a learning disability is significant trouble reading. So the best way to reduce the proportion of children in special education is to train teachers at the front line in the most effective strategies for preventing reading failure. In all but a few cases, early intervention by the classroom teacher can significantly improve the reading skills of students struggling to read.

WHAT IS THE FOCUS OF THE STANDARD?

The standard evaluates whether reading courses for elementary teacher candidates present strategies to address struggling readers.

Standard applies to: Elementary programs.

Standard and Indicators

page 2

Rationale

3

The rationale summarizes research about this standard. The rationale also describes practices in the United States and other countries related to this standard, as well as support for this standard from school leaders, superintendents, and other education personnel.

Methodology

4

The methodology describes the process NCTQ uses to score institutions of higher education on this standard. It explains the data sources, analysis process, and how the standard and indicators are operationalized in scoring.

Research Inventory

7

The research inventory cites the relevant research studies on topics generally related to this standard. Not all studies in the inventory are directly relevant to the specific indicators of the standard, but rather they are related to the broader issues that the standard addresses. Each study is reviewed and categorized based on the strength of its methodology and whether it measures student outcomes. The strongest “green cell” studies are those that both have a strong design and measure student outcomes.

Standard and Indicators

Standard 4: Struggling Readers

The program prepares elementary teacher candidates to teach reading skills to students at risk of reading failure.

Standard applies to: Elementary programs.

Indicator that the program meets the standard:

- 4.1** Reading courses deliver the instructional strategies necessary for teaching struggling readers and require candidates to practice such strategies.

Rationale

Standard 4: Struggling Readers

The program prepares elementary teacher candidates to teach reading skills to students at risk of reading failure.

Standard applies to: Elementary programs.

WHY THIS STANDARD?

In most cases, the root cause of a diagnosis of a learning disability is significant trouble reading. So the best way to reduce the proportion of children in special education is to train teachers at the front line in the most effective strategies for preventing reading failure. In all but a few cases, early intervention by the classroom teacher can significantly improve the reading skills of students struggling to read.

WHAT IS THE FOCUS OF THE STANDARD?

The standard evaluates whether reading courses for elementary teacher candidates present strategies to address struggling readers.

RATIONALE

Research base for this standard

“Strong research”¹ supports the efficacy of training teachers on specific methods to use with struggling readers. Recent strong research has found that increasing teacher candidates’ knowledge of all five areas of reading instruction² and teaching teacher candidates to use strategies tailored to struggling readers³ increase students’ reading ability. Additionally, the research that supports the early reading standard applies to this standard as well; teaching the fundamental underpinnings of reading are as important for struggling readers as for any other beginning reader.

Other support for this standard

Other support for this standard comes from expert panels and school district superintendents, who agree that preparing teachers to work with struggling readers is essential.

- 1 NCTQ has created “research inventories” that describe research conducted within the last decade or so that has general relevance to aspects of teacher preparation also addressed by one or more of its standards (with the exceptions of the Outcomes, Evidence of Effectiveness, and Rigor standards). These inventories categorize research along two dimensions: design methodology and use of student performance data. Research that satisfies our standards on both is designated as “strong research” and will be identified as such. That research is cited here if it is directly relevant to the standard; strong research is distinguished from other research that is not included in the inventory or is not designated as “strong” in the inventory. Refer to the [introduction](#) to the research inventories for more discussion of our approach to categorizing research. If a research inventory has been developed to describe research that generally relates to the same aspect of teacher prep as addressed by a standard, the inventory can be found in the back of this standard book.
- 2 Spear-Swerling, L. (2009). A literacy tutoring experience for prospective special educators and struggling second graders. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 42(5), 431-443.
- 3 Thames, D. G., et al. (2008). Reading comprehension: Effects of individualized, integrated language arts as a reading approach with struggling readers. *Reading Psychology*, 29(1), 86-115.

Methodology

How NCTQ scores the Struggling Readers Standard

Standards and Indicators

DATA USED TO SCORE THIS STANDARD

Evaluation of elementary programs on Standard 4: Struggling Readers uses the following sources of data:

- Syllabi for all required courses that address literacy instruction
- Required textbooks in all required literacy coursework

WHO ANALYZES THE DATA

One [reading subject-specialist](#) evaluates syllabi using a detailed scoring protocol from which this scoring methodology is abstracted. Ten percent of syllabi are randomly selected for a second evaluation to assess scoring variances.

SCOPE OF ANALYSIS

Scores of **undergraduate** and **graduate** teacher preparation programs on the Struggling Readers⁴ Standard are based on examination of syllabi and required textbooks in coursework that is deemed relevant because it addresses literacy instruction in whole or in part. (A discussion of the use of syllabi and textbooks for analysis of course content is provided [here](#).) Unlike the evaluation process for some other content standards, no distinction is drawn between undergraduate and graduate programs.

All required textbooks are also reviewed by [reading experts](#) to evaluate their treatment of strategies for struggling readers. Ratings of reviewed reading textbooks are provided [here](#).⁵

Analysts score syllabi based on coverage in lectures and elements of accountability (assessments, writing assignments, or actual teaching practice) of strategies stated as being related to struggling readers, who may be identified as such, or identified as, for example, “special education students,” “dyslexic students,” “students at risk” or “non-proficient readers.” The analysis does not evaluate the utility of the strategies, only that they are cited as topics for instruction and practice.

The scores in each of these areas are proportional to the coverage. For example, the course receives minimal credit for lecture coverage if such strategies are a part of a single lecture and full lecture credit if they are the focus of two lectures.

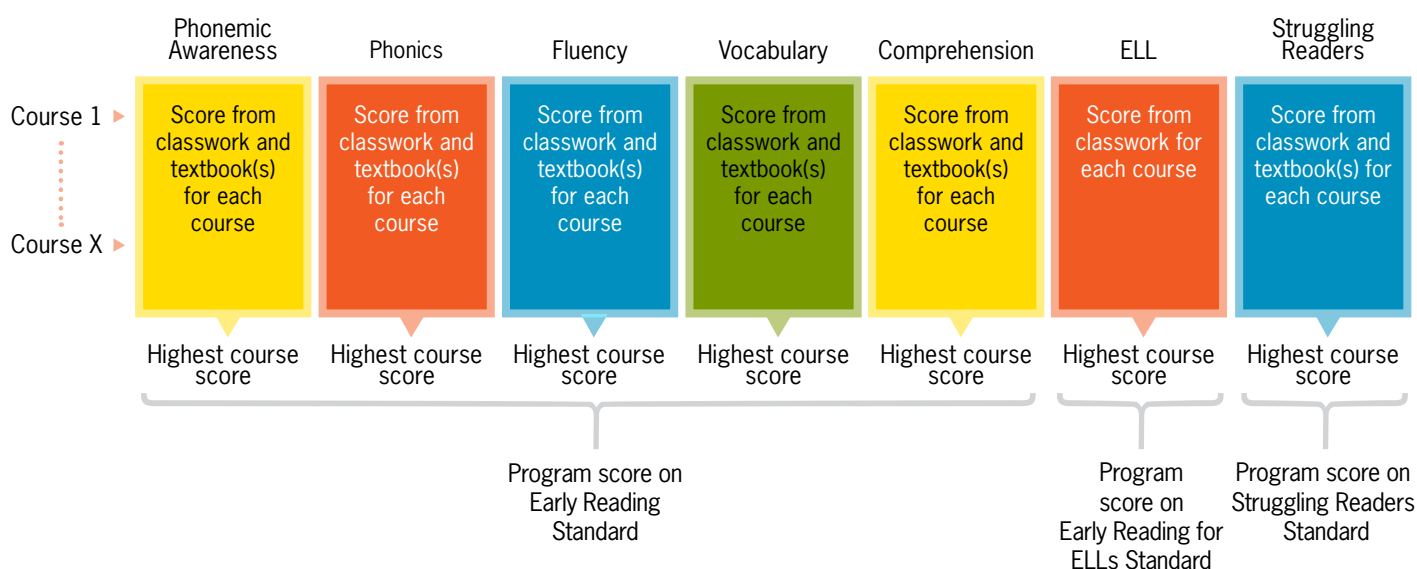
In accordance with Indicator 4.1, scores from syllabus and textbook reviews are combined into a course score.

The overall program score is the highest course score in any course.

4 We define such students as students who are falling behind and having academic difficulties in the area of reading, or students at risk of reading failure if they do not receive appropriate and effective intervention. Students with learning disabilities are included.

5 Note that in earlier field studies of reading coursework, we obtained and evaluated collections of articles compiled by instructors and provided to teacher candidates in lieu of textbooks; we no longer do so because of the belief (expressed in the Early Reading Standard's Indicator 2.2) that textbooks can and should best support effective reading instruction.

Evaluating reading coursework for the Early Reading, Early Reading for English Language Learners, and Struggling Readers Standards





Common misconceptions about how analysts evaluate the Struggling Readers Standard:

- Any required reading or literacy course is relevant to this standard. Every required course that addresses reading or literacy is screened by the analysts to determine relevance for this standard. Required courses that do not specifically address the essential components of effective reading instruction and struggling readers – for example, courses that focus exclusively on the language arts – are irrelevant for this standard and are not evaluated.
- Course objectives or standards mapping are interchangeable with specific lectures, written assignments, assessments, or practice teaching. Many syllabi laudably include objectives and goals for a course; however, the scoring protocol for this standard requires reviewers to look for specific instructional plans (lectures, writing assignments, assessments, practice teaching) that implement those objectives. In other words, an objective with no supporting texts, lectures, assignments or practice teaching is not sufficient.
- References to strategies designed for “diverse populations,” “exceptional needs students,” “students from poverty,” “culturally diverse or English language learner students,” “students with multiple intelligences,” “differentiated instruction,” or “students with different learning styles” are not necessarily relevant to this standard. The focus of this standard is not the broad spectrum of strategies that may be used with these groups of students; rather, it is specifically focused on strategies relating to reading instruction for struggling readers. Thus, strategies relating to these groups are not credited when they stand alone without additional references to strategies relevant to struggling readers.

Examples of what satisfies or does not satisfy the standard's indicator

Delivery of relevant instructional strategies (Indicator 4.1)

 satisfies the indicator	 does not satisfy the indicator
<p>The program has coursework in which both lectures and practice adequately address strategies for teaching struggling readers.:</p> <p>Example:</p> <p>Lectures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Important Principles for Instruction for Delayed Readers ■ The Severely Delayed Reader and the Nonreader <p>Practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ During the semester, you will work closely with an excellent literacy teacher/specialist who has children (possibly at different grade levels) identified for Tier 2/3 instruction. Each of you will select ..., a small group of “case study” students. ... You will make a total of 13 visits to this classroom over the course of the semester. Specific assignments will focus on one-on-one assessments and small group/clinical work with your case study students. 	<p>The program has no coursework in which both lectures and practice adequately address strategies for teaching struggling readers.</p> <p>The program has coursework in which both lectures and practice adequately address strategies for teaching struggling readers, but the program does not meet or nearly meet the Early Reading standard.</p>

Research Inventory

Researching Teacher Preparation: Studies investigating the preparation of teacher candidates for reading instruction of struggling readers

These studies address issues most relevant to Standard 4: Struggling Readers

Total number of studies	Studies with stronger design		Studies with weaker design	
	Measures student outcomes	Does not measure student outcomes	Measures student outcomes	Does not measure student outcomes
12	2	0	1	9
	Citations: 9, 10		Citations: 1	Citations: 2-8, 11, 12

Note: Al Otaiba & Lake (2007), Bos et al. (2001), Duffy & Atkinson (2001), Lake et al. (2010), and Washburn et al. (2011) are cross-listed with RI 2: Early Reading; Spear-Swerling (2009) is cross-listed with RI 9: Content for Special Education.

Citations for articles categorized in the table are listed below.

Databases: Education Research Complete and Education Resource Information Center (peer-reviewed listings of reports on research including United States populations).

Publication dates: Jan 2000 – June 2012

See [Research Inventories: Rationale and Methods](#) for more information on the development of this inventory of research.

1. Al Otaiba, S., & Lake, V. E. (2007). Preparing special educators to teach reading and use curriculum-based assessments. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 20(6), 591–617.
2. Bos, C., Mather, N., Dickson, S., Podhajski, B., & Chard, D. (2001). Perceptions and knowledge of preservice and inservice educators about early reading instruction. *Annals of Dyslexia*, 51(1), 97–120.
3. Duffy, A. M., & Atkinson, T. S. (2001). Learning to teach struggling (and non-struggling) elementary school readers: An analysis of preservice teachers' knowledge. *Reading Research and Instruction*, 41(1), 83–102.
4. Hall, L. A. (2009). "A necessary part of good teaching": Using book clubs to develop preservice teachers' visions of self. *Literacy Research & Instruction*, 48(4), 298–317.
5. Jetton, T. L. (2003). Using computer-mediated discussion to facilitate preservice teachers' understanding of literacy assessment and instruction. *Journal of Research on Technology In Education*, 36(2), 171–191.
6. Lake, V. E., Al Otaiba, S., & Guidry, L. (2010). Developing social skills training and literacy instruction pedagogy through service learning: An integrated model of teacher preparation. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 31(4), 373–390.
7. Mayor, S. (2005). Preservice teachers' developing perspectives on assessment and remediation of struggling readers. *Reading Improvement*, 42(3), 164.

8. Scharlach, T. (2008). These kids just aren't motivated to read: The influence of preservice teachers' beliefs on their expectations, instruction, and evaluation of struggling readers. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 47(3), 158–173.
9. Spear-Swerling, L. (2009). A literacy tutoring experience for prospective special educators and struggling second graders. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 42(5), 431–443.
10. Thames, D. G., Reeves, C., Kazelskis, R., York, K., Boling, C., Newell, K., & Wang, Y. (2008). Reading comprehension: Effects of individualized, integrated language arts as a reading approach with struggling readers. *Reading Psychology*, 29(1), 86–115.
11. Washburn, E. K., Joshi, R., & Cantrell, E. (2011). Are preservice teachers prepared to teach struggling readers?. *Annals Of Dyslexia*, 61(1), 21–43.
12. Zhihui, F., & Ashley, C. (2004). Preservice teachers' interpretations of a field-based reading block. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 55(1), 39–54.



National Council on Teacher Quality

1120 G Street, NW, Suite 800
Washington, D.C. 20005
Tel: 202 393-0020 Fax: 202 393-0095
Web: www.nctq.org